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ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether exposure to contrastive rhetoric would deepen international students' awareness of first- and second-language conventions characterizing their own and other students' writing. Participants included 46 University of Arizona students who represented a variety of language backgrounds and were enrolled in four sections of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) freshman composition. One week of class time was devoted to a presentation on contrastive rhetoric, and writing samples were collected from each student. From the samples, aspects of the writers' purpose, message, tone, and audience were analyzed. The features noted were then charted and discussed in class. Finally, the students' reactions to the contrastive rhetoric lesson and chart were expressed in freewriting exercises. No evidence emerged that consciousness of first-language rhetorical conventions makes adoption of second-language discourse patterns easier. However, it was concluded that awareness of context, enhanced by knowledge of linguistic and rhetorical forms, is a valid objective in ESL writing instruction. (MSE)

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READING THE CONTEXT

Presented at TESOL Conference, San Antonio, Texas (March 1989)

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We begin this paper by making an analogy between the powerful effect of Robert Kaplan's (1966) diagrams of cultural discourse patterns and the role of codification in Paulo Freire's (1970) pedagogy for the oppressed. Freire considers literacy to involve reading the world as basis for reading the text. His pedagogy consists of three phases: (1) the codification of central aspects of peasant life in pictures, (2) the use of "generative" words to decodify or critically respond to the pictures and (3) "recodification" in which reflection and action are combined, enabling the peasants to conceive of and begin the transformation of their world.

Through his diagrams of cultural discourse patterns, Kaplan codified the intuitions of ESL composition teachers. By thus symbolizing or objectifying the teachers' experience, he opened up the topic of contrastive rhetoric for dialogue, a dialogue through which the patterns are still being decodified and critically analyzed by linguists, language teachers, and students. During the third Freirean phase, which entails problem-posing and critical intervention, linguists and teachers combine reflection with action to transform the ways in which contrastive rhetoric is researched and composition in English taught. A key characteristic of the Freirean model is that teachers must be co-learners with their students. Our study is characterized by an

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attempt to involve students in analysis of and reflections on contrastive rhetoric.

The success of a codification is marked by the powerful sense of recognition it evokes and by the quality of questioning and challenge it stimulates. For over 20 years, Kaplan's diagrams of cultural discourse patterns (1966) have prompted questions about attempts to generalize about a culture's textual conventions. In fact, in 1987 Kaplan himself wrote that the rhetorical patterns he sketched in 1966 are "possible in any language. . . . The issue is that each language has clear preferences, so that while all forms are possible, all forms do not occur with equal frequency or in parallel distributions" (p. 10). Although clarification is useful, the fact remains that simply describing to students the structural "preferences" of a certain culture provides students with a limited, even distorted view, of contrastive rhetoric. Furthermore, by attempting to transmit a particular perception of contrastive rhetoric, we deny our students the opportunity to explore their own ways of making meaning. If we consider reading and writing to be contextual, meaning-generated transactions with text, one valuable way of examining contrastive rhetoric is from the perspective of the students' own cultural and rhetorical awareness.

ESL students' perspectives on language and rhetoric will, of course, differ from perspectives generated by students who are a part of the mainstream American culture. As literary theorist Eagleton has pointed out, readers' responses to texts are determined to a great extent by the way they position themselves "socially and historically" (1983, p. 83). Clearly, ESL students

from various cultures will position themselves toward texts differently from many American students. We view this situation as being to the International students' advantage: Since they are functioning outside of their own culture, they have a distance from their own rhetorical traditions, which can allow them to critically examine and conceptualize the rhetoric of their first language, perhaps for the first time. And, being at this point somewhat outside the English-speaking academic community in the United States, they are in a position to adopt a critical perspective toward the American rhetorical tradition as well. A critical perspective on rhetoric--to paraphrase Freire (Freire & Macedo, 1987)--involves reading the context as well as the text--with students reflecting on their linguistic, cultural, and political positions toward the text as well as reading the text itself.

An important study which helped students to read the context as well as the text was conducted by Liebman (1989). Her L1 and L2 college freshman composition classes exchanged letters and did assignments which led them to examine their language experiences. Central to the course was a paper written to support or rebut Kaplan's 1966 article. Liebman commented upon the value of studying contrastive rhetoric as a means of making students conscious of their own rhetorical choices and expectations.

Description of Study

In fall 1988, we conducted a study to determine whether exposure to contrastive rhetoric would deepen international

students' awareness of the L1 and L2 rhetorical conventions characterizing their own and one another's writing. Forty-six International students in four sections of ESL freshman composition at the University of Arizona participated in all of the first week's activities. Approximately equal numbers of these students represented a variety of cultures from Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. These students' teachers gave us permission to spend one week giving a presentation on contrastive rhetoric and collecting writing samples from the students. A description of the presentation together with handouts is provided in the Appendix pages 1-4.

The focus of our lesson was a chart of rhetorical differences among various cultures, which we we called the "Regional Rhetorical Features Chart." (Appendix, p. 2.) This chart was presented to stimulate inquiry and comparisons of L1 and L2 rhetorical conventions. Developed from interviews with language scholars and highly-educated members of different cultures, the chart described the global features of argumentative rhetorics of Anglo-European, Asian, and Middle Eastern cultures. These features included aspects of the writer's purpose, message, tone, and audience. This chart was not, however, intended to be a comprehensive, accurate analysis of these cultures' rhetorics, for reader-writer interactions are far too diverse, personal, and complicated for such a simplified presentation. Instead, the chart was introduced as a catalyst for discussion and reflection. The lesson consisted of students reading and talking about the chart, and then noticing features in English texts produced by an Arabic and a Korean writer (Appendix, pp. 3-4).

In this paper, we will not be able to discuss all the writing samples generated from this contrastive rhetoric lesson. Instead, we will focus on two of the most striking sets of responses: the students' freewriting on the Regional Rhetorical Features Chart and their end-of-semester freewriting about their reactions to the contrastive rhetoric lesson. In general, these freewritings demonstrated the students' growing consciousness of the socio-cultural dimension of making meaning. Few students were were preoccupied merely by form; instead, the writing samples showed that the students' personal, social, and educational identities profoundly shaped their reactions to our lesson. In this paper will present the patterns of responses which we perceived in this freewriting.

We analyzed these responses by using a procedure similar to Glaser's (1965) constant comparative method. We first independently read each student's written reactions and then discussed tentative coding categories. Next, we re-read the students' responses and modified these categories; we collapsed some categories and established completely new ones. Finally, we came to agreement about where to place each piece of writing. Thus we allowed the categories to emerge and change as we read and re-read the students' written reactions.

Immediate Reactions to the Rhetorical Features Chart

Students freewrote in response to this prompt:

> Freewrite for at least ten minutes on your responses to the Regional Rhetorical Features Chart on page 65 of the ESL Guide. Do you

> feel the chart accurately represents the rhetorical style of your culture? Why or why not?

The majority of the students (34 of the 46, or 74 percent) agreed with the chart. We divided this agreement category into three subcategories: (1) students whose comments essentially repeated or embellished information in the chart, (2) students who expressed agreement with the chart but who also added new information about the speaker, audience, purpose, or message; and (3) students who agreed but who discussed aspects of rhetoric from a culture not included in the chart. Page five of the appendix summarizes these categories of responses.

The students in the first agreement subcategory tended to simply take a section of the chart and explain that it was true by describing an aspect of their own writing experiences. For instance, an student from a European background wrote this about his relationship to his audience: "I don't try to convince the audience to agree with my viewpoint.... Instead I choose my own mood and persuade the audience to subtly adapt my tone and mood."

The students who wrote comments which added new information about speaker, audience, purpose, or message discussed topics such as changes in rhetoric brought about by modernization, the causes of these rhetorical differences, and the effect of particular rhetorical contexts on these rhetorical conventions. For example, a Japanese student wrote that the younger Japanese are less likely to accept the opinion of a speaker or a writer than the older generation. Another student discussed religious and political reasons for a passive audience role in Indonesia,

pointing out that "during the colonization, we don't have any right to speak up."

We decided that six students agreed with the notion of the chart in general, but felt strongly that the chart omitted their particular culture; in the words of one of these students, "the description in the chart is incomplete." Two students from Africa and two from Latin America were especially articulate on this issue. One South African student wrote about the tensions in African rhetoric between native oratorical traditions and intrusions of colonial literacy, and discussed speaker, audience, purpose, and message in terms of these tensions. A Mexican student focused on the concept of audience in Latin cultures, asserting that "the audience in Mexico is critical but there is also a common denominator between the speaker and the audience such [as] religion and traditions."

Nine of the students disagreed with one or more categories in the chart. One student began his response by saying, "the rhetorical features chart is highly generalized and geographically incorrect." He then argued that the Asian category needed to be broken down into separate countries. A student from Cyprus wrote that his country's rhetoric didn't fit any style because it was too unique. Other students took issue with what the chart said about their culture's audience, speaker, message, or tone.

Finally, three students disagreed with the concept of the chart itself. "I don't like this whole idea," wrote one student. "It could be expected that most heavily influencing factor is going to be speaker's personality . . . ideology, and intel-

ligence" rather than the concept of the rhetoric of a certain culture. Another student simply said the chart was stereotyped and biased.

Thus, the chart elicited a full range of responses. In general, we felt that some of the students in the first category who expressed complete agreement with the chart, without extending it by bringing in their own ideas and experience, were giving fairly perfunctory "teacher-pleasing" responses. At the other end of the scale, we received several fairly hostile comments which made us consider possible implications of the chart, which of course, we had not intended. But no matter which category students fell in, their words demonstrated they used their own socio-cultural histories in order to make sense of our codification of rhetoric. Clearly, the chart served as a heuristic to remind students of the social dimensions of writing.

In discussing these responses, we also need to mention the geographic breakdown of the respondents in each category. (This breakdown is given in the appendix, p. 5.) As you can see, a variety of nationalities is represented in each category, but there is some difference among the three major cultural aggregates represented in the chart. Seventy-nine percent of the Asian students feel into one of the agreement categories; 71 percent of the Anglo-Europeans agreed; but only 58 percent of the Middle Eastern students agree with the chart's representation. We can only speculate on the implications of these differences; it certainly seems that many Middle Eastern students disagreed with the chart's claiming a "basic unity" between Middle Eastern speakers and audiences.

Delayed Reactions to the Contrastive Rhetoric Lesson

The final paper of the term, a rhetorical analysis of a published English essay, is assigned to focus students on formal criteria just before they write the in-class expository or argumentative essays that serve as the final examination. We were curious whether students had consciously brought their earlier experience with contrastive rhetoric to bear on the formal rhetorical analysis assignment. Therefore, at the end of the semester, we asked teachers to solicit student responses to the presentation. The prompt was simply, "Did the lesson on contrastive rhetoric (in October) have any influence on your rhetorical analysis essay? Why or why not?" The fact that this freewriting was an optional-- and anonymous-- assignment probably accounts for our receiving only twenty-two responses. However, we infer that most of this number had something that they really wanted to say because they chose to write at the busiest point in the semester. Moreover, the anonymity of the final freewriting also provided students with an implicit opportunity to comment upon the worth of the presentation.

The freewriting generated a range of reflection on relationships between languages and the implications of rhetorical differences. Our categorizations of these responses are presented on the bottom of Appendix page five. (Because we wanted these responses to be completely anonymous, we had not way of knowing the respondents' nationalities.)

As you can see, seven of the 22 students (31 percent) used the chart and/or the contrastive rhetoric lesson as a way of

improving their own L2 writing. Some of these students focused on form or formula in writing English. For instance, one student wrote, "It helped me in getting an idea about how one would look for mistakes in the organization of ideas." Other students wrote about form in reference to the rhetorical analysis assignment: "The lesson did influence my analysis because I was specifically looking for Anglosaxophonic formats of writing. When I was considering the development of the essay, i.e., the thesis and body of the argument, I examined the consistency of the thesis to the argument. On several ocassions, [I noticed] he wandered off in not so direct arguments."

One student even provided a list of advice he derived from the presenter's remarks:

> I think the lesson helped me to do rhetorical analysis. I remember some points from her discussion:
> 1. To look if the author repeat again and again on the same idea in other words.
> 2. To see how he develop the essay, is it organized in order.
> 3. Does all the points are belonging to the thesis.
> 4. In American culture I have to write in logical approach to convince people.

A second category of students regarded the lesson as more than providing tools for successful writing in English. Their responses were more holistic. For instance, one student observed, "The awareness you happened to simulate in my mind took place much earlier in my papers, and since you gave us that lecture, my process of writing has been adjusted to the American expectation . . . . I believe this process has become 'subconscious' to me."

Another remarked,

> The lesson actually did not mean anything at the time, October, because i was not sure what I was exactly doing in the lesson. Rather I was just enjoying and evaluating those two essays. However, ... I have realized that now I could write better rhetorical analysis on those short essays... because I know better how to look at inside of essay deeply, in the constructions, tone, and the purpose of the auther. So I think it was a good preview for this.

A third group focused on relationships between L1 and L2 rhetoric--either connecting rhetorical conventions to cognitive styles or describing their attitudes toward L1 or L2 rhetoric. One issue that emerged was whether rhetorical style is indicative of thinking style--an issue that has been discussed by linguists and anthropologists, as well as ESL teachers. In Kaplan's 1966 article and Reid's 1984 publication, it is suggested that differences in external manifestations may be evidence for differences in internal processes. However, subsequent research supports the need to keep evidence of cultural rhetorical preferences apart from the notion of internal processing (Grabe & Kaplan, 1989). It is no wonder, though, that students, unfamiliar with current research, would consider similar hypotheses about cognitive style. One student commented, "I liked the lesson that day as it helped us see the thinking patterns."

This category of responses also included evidence of the affective reactions that consideration of rhetorical differences produced in some students. For instance, one student said he was "emotionally affected by the lecture" because it reminded him of his frustrations with Japanese rhetoric and the Japanese educa-

tional system: "I hadn't pay attention to my country's retholic [rhetoric]. (I'm a Japanese). But since then, I have really hated that kind of structore." Another student wrote:

> For some reason, when the lesson was presented in class, and in particular the chart about different nationalities rhetorical structures, I believed it. I don't now. This is so because of the recent research I have undertook on rhetoric criticism.... I have discovered that rhetoric involves primarily a person's intelligence. ... What beats me . . . . is the way in which some "scholars" have come up charts like the one presented to us. The arguments used in drafting such a chart, are similar to the one that claims (by some crazy people) that some races are superior than the others. . . . The fact that these rules on writing and rhetoric are written by Westerners (mostly), makes one wonder why is it like this. And why International students are supposed to adopt these rules.

This student's words reinforce Freire's dictum that the word and the world cannot be separated; that students must read the world out of their own experience, and by objectifying that experience through words, experience can then become the basis of critical consciousness. This student's response was critical, but it accentuated how lack of time had severely restricted our opportunity to dialogue with students in the study about matters such as the cultural versus the cognitive significance of logical proofs in Western rhetoric. This student's response also brought to mind another area of discussion that may have been prematurely truncated. In an effort to stimulate reflection about possible consequences of immersion in a second-language rhetoric, we had cited a study that commented on how Korean students who had been educated in the United States sometimes had difficulty retaining

native rhetorical conventions when they wrote in Korean (Eggington, 1987). None of the students in the study explicitly commented upon that risk in their freewriting, but this concern seemed to have resurfaced for this particular student during the course of his own reading, writing, and critical thought. Will calling students' attention to such matters raise their affective filter against learning a language?

Conclusion

Because of the way we designed our study, we uncovered no evidence that consciousness of first-language rhetorical conventions makes it easier for international students to appropriate L2 discourse patterns. Yet, we favor the practice of encouraging student reflection on contrastive rhetoric because, in our view, the purpose of ESL composition classes is not only to assist students to approximate linguistic and rhetorical forms: Rather, teachers and students also need to think about the ways a particular culture's rhetoric helps to shape a person's knowledge and values. They need to be conscious of context.

Our experience conducting this study certainly made us more conscious of context. We became even more aware of the difficulty of conducting research as outsiders rather than classroom teachers. As visiting presenters, we lacked the opportunity to observe whether or how students or teachers wove aspects of contrastive rhetoric into the rest of the course. Our chart and lesson helped to codify issues and conventions for students, but we were not there to participate in the interpretation of these

matters. The classroom teacher, on the other hand, has the opportunity to to engage in an on-going dialogue with her students, whereby clarification can be made and meaningful connections recursively explored. When teachers and students carefully observe and describe ESL lessons and interactions, they re-present classroom culture. Through exploring classroom and rhetorical contexts with our students, together we clarify our situation, critically reflect upon our purposes, and transform our practices.

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LESSON ON CONTRASTIVE RHETORIC

The lesson on contrastive rhetoric was designed to raise international students' consciousness of their own rhetorical backgrounds. Because of time constraints, all phases of the discussion outlined below involved the entire class. Parts B and C, however, would easily lend themselves to small group discussion.

A. The questions presented below (a) activate student's background knowledge about rhetoric, and (b) then lead from metacognitive reflection on their own written work in their English composition class to (c) consciousness of writing conventions in their own own cultures.

1. What does the term "rhetoric" mean to you?
2. How does the writer of an essay affect the reader?
3. What strategies did you use in your culture essays? (referring to their last written assignment)
4. Why did each of you use different strategies?
5. Keeping in mind the strategies you mentioned using in your last paper--how would your paper have been different if you had written it in your own culture?

B. Students respond to the Regional Rhetorical Features Chart. (See attached.)

C. With reference to the chart, students examine samples of writing that provide evidence of Korean and Arabic discourse conventions. (See attached.)

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Regional Rhetorical Features Chart*

Ann Schlumberger

	Anglo-European	Middle Eastern	Asian
Speaker	an individual who defends or promotes an idea or position	identifies self and message with the norms of the community	an authority figure announcing the truth
Audience	critical, individualistic participants in the message situation	The speaker's basic unity with the audience is emphasized through references to shared religion and traditions.	receptive, introspective recipients of the message
Purpose	to convince the audience to agree with the speaker's viewpoint	to proclaim the message so the audience will embrace it as truth compatible with the Qur'an and tradition	to obtain the audience's internalization of the message (not the same critical agreement required in the West)
Message	Reflects individual speaker's views shaped to be acceptable to a particular audience; use of logical proof and concrete evidence is expected.	Speaker's views are shown to be compatible with what the community regards as truth. Generalizations rather than specific details are prized.	traditional period--reflects society's conventional wisdom and religious revelations; modern period--reflects ideological truth or accepted pragmatic objectives
	appeals to self-interest of audience	appeals to the authority of the Qur'an and the community	appeals to authority and analogy
	Style may reflect speaker's originality as well as be shaped by content and audience's expectations. Linear development is usual.	Style is impressionistic and based on repetition of ideas, sounds, and structures.	Style relies on formalized patterns.**
	Tone is adapted to the mood of the audience.	Tone is eloquent, assertive, and emphatic.	Tone is calm, authoritative, and matter-of-fact.

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* University of Arizona scholars who contributed to this chart are Drs. Leslie Flemming, Charles Hedtke, John Hou, Chisato Kitagawa, Ronald Miao, William Wilson. Also, Katie Al-Ajmi and Hassan Abbas.

** Dr. Kitagawa describes Japanese rhetoric as requiring "a model of reality, including individual cases and particular instances."

student essay quoted by Shirley E. Ostler in "English in Parallels: A Comparison of English and Arabic Prose." Cited in Writing Across Languages (1987).

(1) We face two serious problems in my country. (2) The first problem is that we import many things from other countries and we cannot depend on ourselves in producing the things we need. (3) We import different kinds of food, electric materials, cars and clothes. (4) The second problem is that we depend on one source of income and that is oil. (5) Our national economy depends on it. (6) We have a lot of revenues each year from the oil export that come to us from selling this material. (7) It is not good for our country to depend on one source and it has to vary in its resources.

(8) We can solve the first problem by building many factories and we have to develop our soil to be useful for agriculture. (9) We ahve to form educated people to serve their country. (10) We can solve the second problem by seeking for other resources that we have in my country, not to depend on one source like oil. (11) Finally we will become a developed country and we can insure our future and our life.

article from the Korean Times cited by William G. Eggington in "Written Academic Discourse in Korean: Implications for Effective Communication" in Writing Across Languages (1987).

The Ministry of Home Affairs is planning to lengthen the period of training for public officials from 3 days to 6 days per year in order to solidify the spirituality of the public officials. The training is to be conducted at the Spiritual Cultural Institute which is rendered in English as the Institute for Korean Studies.

A new meaning of "national" is attached to the word "spiritual." Perhaps this comes from the term "spiritual culture."

A member of the Korean Alphabet Society complained that the architectural design of the Institute for Korean Studies resembles a Buddhist Temple and thus is not Korean. This is not so because Buddhism, though imported from India, is a Korean religion. Likewise, Christianity is a Korean religion.

Any attempt to label what is national and what is foreign fails.

Perhaps too much emphasis on nationalism may do more harm than good.

Instead of inspiring nationalism we should be appealing to universal reason and proper moral conduct. The civil spirit must take precedence over the national spirit.

I am reminded of this when, changing trains at the subway, I witness the rush to occupy seats on route to the sports center where the Olympic Games are to be held. How do we enhance the nation's prestige through a sports event? As a teacher I am partly responsible for this situation.

Spiritual poverty is best observed in a metropolitan area like Seoul. Why is our public transport system so multi-layered with standing buses at the bottom, then regular buses charging three times more than standing buses, and finally taxis which move constantly to catch more passengers?

Once you catch a taxi you have to listen to the loud radio controlled by the driver.

"Dear administrators, please do not talk about spiritual things unless you are interested in implementing concrete ethical conduct."

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Immediate Reactions to Rhetorical Features Chart

n = 46

	Agree & Embellish	Agree & Extend Existing Category	Agree & Add Cultural Column	Disagree with major element	Disagree with whole chart
Number of Students:	13	15	6	9	3
Countries of origin:	Bolivia Indonesia Israel Japan (2) Malaysia Mexico Pakistan Saudi Arabia Sweden Thailand Taiwan Vietnam	Chad China India Indonesia (3) Hong Kong Japan (2) Lebanon Mexico Nigeria Panama Trinidad W. Germany	China Ethiopia Iran Mexico (2) S. Africa	Cyprus Hong Kong India Indonesia Iran Japan Lebanon Lesotho Switzerland	Bulgaria Lebanon Poland

Delayed Reactions to Chart and Contrastive Rhetoric Lesson

Used chart/lesson as tool for L2 writing:	7
Reflected on L2 rhetoric:	4
Discussed L1 & L2 differences:	3
*Reacted to other aspects of lesson:	3
*Discussed only rhetorical analysis assignment:	5
	22 total

*Did not directly refer to chart/lesson